

52 SALT CAVES IN LUMBWA DISTRICT—

STERNOTHRÆUS SINUATUS (SMITH)

A head of this large water-tortoise was found bottled in a German house at Morogoro.

PELOMEDUSA GALEATA (SCHOEPP.)

Young female, measuring 83 mm. in length, was collected at Tabora (13/12/18), where they are probably not uncommon.

NOTES ON SALT CAVES IN LUMBWA DISTRICT—
BRITISH EAST AFRICA

BY A. KNIGHT BRUCE.

There are believed to be nine of these caves of any size in Lumbwa District, their names being :

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| 1. GITOI | 4. KIBARABARA | 7. SAUSIT |
| 2. KIBRISIN | 5. KIPTOI | 8. RIPTOIT |
| 3. KIBIPITEN | 6. CHOMA | 9. BAGAW |

The Lumbwa at the present day dig salt in these caves, which they remove in baskets, and feed to their cattle and sheep outside.

In Kibipiten the entry is made in the evening, the salt is dug out at night and removed in the morning. Apparently in most of the others, owing to the number of accidents which have occurred lately from falling rock, digging is confined to the entrance only.

NOTES ON BAGAW SALT CAVE, LUMBWA DISTRICT

This cave is situated near the top of the Escarpment which rises from the Nyando River on its left bank, between Lumbwa and Fort Ternan stations.

Its entrance is under a waterfall on the Sambula stream. It is difficult to arrive at even an approximate idea of its age, though the natives agree that it is not of any great antiquity.

Its origin is attributed to game being noticed nibbling at the face of the rock. Probably cattle followed their example,

until men, realising that they gained some benefit from the practice, began to dig the stuff and to feed their stock with it.

Till some four years ago the cave was free from rocks falling; now, owing to the number of fatal accidents which have occurred, digging is confined to the entrance only.

The tree near the entrance should be noticed—it is evidently of no great age, yet as evidently, since it was of mature growth, the action of the waterfall has removed all the soil from its base, which was *above* the level of the roof of the entrance to the cave.

The entrance is only some 4 feet high, but immediately on entering the height rises to above 8 feet, and a cave of very irregular shape, of an average width of about 40 feet, is disclosed. This continues for 150 yards, when the floor suddenly rises, and the cave bifurcates into the branches.

About 50 yards farther along each of these branches the passage was stopped by huge slabs of rock which had fallen down from above.

A considerable fall of rock had occurred the night before I entered, and many more slabs appeared to be on the verge of falling, and, as a space of only some 18 inches was left, further progress was impossible.

The nature of the walls varies—at the entrance the rock strata are not well defined, and the Exhibit B (called White and Red, Lumbwa Ngelel and Ngebirir) is found in patches.

Farther on, however, the strata become uniform—the rock (Exhibit C) lying in horizontal lines with Ngebirir between the strata, at distances of about a foot. But Exhibit A (called Black and White, Lumbwa Ngetoi) is found in patches.

The roof is formed of rock lying in strata all the way. Two supports have been left—off the first one Exhibit A was chipped.

No water was noticed in this cave. To reach the end is a reputed journey of 2–3 hours.

KIBIPITEN SALT CAVE

This cave is situated on the Kiptiget River, about 5 miles up-stream from the bridge over which the old bridle-path to Kericho crosses, and is about 6,500 feet above sea-level.

Its situation is practically the same as Bagaw, but the waterfall is higher.

The entrance is also low, but the height rises inside to about 12 feet, with an average width of over 60 feet. After running for 60 yards this cave also forms two branches, and the height decreases to about 3 feet; after following these for about 30 yards, I was in each case stopped by deep pools which had been formed by digging for salt.

No regular strata are found here as in Bagaw, the Exhibit A (Ngebirir and Ngelel) was found in patches in the rock, Exhibit C, which appeared to be of much the same nature throughout.

Exhibit B was taken from the entrance to the cave.

Exhibit D (Ngelel) was also found in patches.

I was able to obtain more definite information as to the age of this cave. Old wazee I questioned stated that within their memory it only entered the rock for a distance of 25 yards—their grandfathers started the excavation when they first came to that district.

Now it is supposed to take 2 hours to reach the end, but it should be remembered that progress is very slow, especially as the native only sees his way by lighting torches of twigs, and most of the way it is necessary to crawl on hands and knees.

GENERAL NOTES

Both the other caves visited (Gitoi and Riptoiti) present almost similar features as those described above. (The former has already been described by Mr. C. M. Dobbs, in the *JOURNAL* of the E.A.N.H.S., vol. v. No. 10, p. 125.)

From inquiries made, the same remark appears to be true of these which I have been unable to visit.

In absence of expert investigation, I formed the following conclusions :

These caves have, at any rate, been mainly formed by the labour of man, and, though resulting from an industry somewhat alien to the Lumbwa character, do not represent such a heavy task as might be imagined. For instance, Kibipiten, say 50 years ago, was only 25 yards long, now it is

reported to take $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours to search the end, though I was unable to verify this fact. I should say, however, that this represents a mile at the outside—this, therefore, means a progress of about 35 yards a year, but personally I should not think it likely that this cave is a mile long, since the task of removing a basket filled with rock this distance would occupy nearly a day.

While crawling about in caves like these without any means of measurement, one naturally forms totally erroneous ideas of distance—apart from the usual exaggeration of native reports.

Again, the fact that these caves appear to be universally suffering from their roofs falling in, in the absence of any marked disturbance, hardly seems to point to their being of any great antiquity.

It was most unfortunate that these phenomena coincided with the investigation.

THE LUMBWA CIRCUMCISION AGES

By C. M. DOBBS

Early in 1918 I made some investigations into the circumcision periods of the Lumbwa, with a view to try and find out the ages of some of the old men in the district, and it has occurred to me that the results of my inquiries may be of interest to readers of the JOURNAL. From the investigations made, it appears that the main circumcision festivals of the Lumbwa take place about every five years approximately. As far as I can make out, a certain number of youths are circumcised every year, but the great majority are done about the harvest time, at these fairly regular intervals. Each circumcision age (Ibinda) has a special name of its own given to it, often from some extremely trivial circumstance that occurred about the time of the ceremony. This fact that the name given was often a topical one was very useful in fixing the exact date of several of the most recent ceremonies, and thereby finding the dates of the older ones. Below will be found a